

Following are transcripts of some old letters from the Abiel Leonard Papers of the State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscript Collection (formerly the Western Historical Manuscript Collection; information and index at <http://shs.umsystem.edu/manuscripts/invent/1013.pdf>). Copies of these letters were sent to me by John Wanamaker in June 2002. I have not typed them exactly as is, but have rather tried to make them more readable by correcting spelling and punctuation. Hopefully I have not misrepresented or mistyped anything; the handwriting is very difficult to read in some places. There are notes at the end to give some context (who the various people are, etc.).

– Mike Wilson

Letter to Mrs. J. E. [Jeanette] Leonard from D. C. [Davis Clark] Reeves, dated March 20th 1837 at Memphis, Tennessee

Dear Sister

Yesterday, when passing by the mouth of the Ohio River, my mind was brought to bear on years that are past, when we were all under the protection of a father and mother, and to contrast this period of our existence with that exhibits how great the changes a few fleeting seasons have made in our family. I feel my dear sister that I have given you good grounds to consider me unkind and unbrotherly in not writing to you, but were you to ask me the cause of my long silence I am sure that I would but speak the true feelings of my nature when I would say that it is owing only to our never being in the habit of writing to each other. But when I reflect upon the great changes which our Creator has wrought amongst us, I feel that my plea for my silence is very unsatisfactory even to myself. In the month of December, I went to Mississippi with the intention to settle there, but the sickness of that climate and the dissipation of the community were so great that I have abandoned all idea of living there. In the month of February, Mrs. Phillips and myself left Clinton, Miss., for Texas, but I was attacked with sickness in Vicksburg, which prevented me from taking the trip. I got on a boat and returned immediately to Kentucky. I am now returning to Clinton, but do not intend to remain in south but a week or two. Mrs. Phillips and Ellen are in Mississippi and I presume they will return with me. I have not seen my father or any of his family since December, but understood that they were all well, and that himself and Lady intended to visit you in May. I am pleased with the companion our father has chosen. She is sensible, prudent, and affectionate. Mary has been unwell the most of this winter. Her constitution is very frail. When I left, her health was something better than it had been. It is probable that I will move out to Missouri in the course of this season. The motion of the boat is so great that I have written you a rough letter; you must excuse it. Tender my love to Grandmother, and to all my connection.

Your brother truly and affectionately,
D. C. Reeves

Letter to A. [Abiel] Leonard from B. H. [Benjamin Harrison] Reeves, dated Sep 30 1841 at Todd County Ky

Dear Sir,

It is with the deepest feelings of sorrow that I now write you. Last night I returned home from paying the last sad melancholy duties to my child. Clark Reeves departed this life just before 5 in the morning of the 28th Inst. He was taken sick in July, was quite ill for some weeks – recovered so far as to be able with his family to visit me. About four weeks ago, himself and friends thought he was in a fair way to recover. A few days after his return home, I was sent for. His malady increased. No human skill could stay or arrest it. He died easy, like a child going to sleep, but rejoicing in the confident hope of a happy immortality.

Oh that my life, but above all that my death could be like his. Yea [?] of certainty of the future. But he is gone, gone from me. The stroke you can not feel as I feel it, & I pray God that you may never feel such pangs as now wring my heart. But why should I mourn, 'tis the lot of man to die & altho, one of the props of my declining years have been wrested from under me, 'tis his gain. An eternity of glory to him, but a world of pain to me. I write to you to communicate the sad intelligence to his Sister and Brother as prudence may direct. Heaven bless you & them.

B. H. Reeves

Letter [presumably to Jeanette Leonard] from B. H. [Benjamin Harrison] Reeves, dated Decr. 20 1845 at Mount Aventine Ky.

My dear child

Your esteemed favour of the 7th just came [to] hand this morning, and whilst in the post office after receiving it, I wrote you this hasty note.

We are all in good health, and so is your Brother Wm. and his whole family. Ben is now at home. His school at Elkton has just terminated. He begins to be more attentive to his studies. Sally Reeves has been living with William ever since he moved to this neighborhood, teaching his children and our daughter Missouri. She I think will continue teaching them next year.

I have nothing of interest to write you. I mentioned in a former letter that John Crop had returned from Va. with a wife. I think he will settle near his Uncle Crop near Clarksville. He is there now upon a visit. Lucy is at her Sister Catharine's and will remain there until after the holidays.

I forgot to mention the melancholy catastrophe that occurred last week at your Uncle Willis Reeves'. Eliza, his stepdaughter, took a convulsion whilst her mother stepped to the door of her lard room to give the servants some directions, and fell in the fire and was so badly burned that she died a few days after. Mary Jane Reeves has been a good deal afflicted with chills and fever, but is recovering. Mr. McGarvey I believe has declined going to St. Louis. At all events, he is now extensively engaged in the tobacco business in Hopkinsville and speaks of nothing else. I think all is uncertainty about his where he is [?].

My pleasure would be greatly heightened if I could be with you a few weeks this winter. Our winter here has set in like a roaring lion. We too have some sleighing in these parts – a novelty with us.

Give my love to each one of your children, to W. Ewin and family, and all other friends. I am with true affection

yours [?]
B. H. Reeves

I am truly pleased to hear of John's fidelity to you. He is with me a great favourite. Tell him for me I shall always expect him to be attentive to my children, for my kindness to him. Say to him Charles come in, in about a week [?].

Letter to J. E. [Jeanette] Leonard from William L. Reeves, dated June 2 [?] 1846 at Todd County Kentucky

My dear Sister,

It is with no ordinary degree of pleasure I take my pen in hand to write you a few lines. I have nothing that is very interesting to write you. I had quite a pleasant time of it coming home, the passengers quite sociable and agreeable. Some of my old acquaintances from Howard, [partly missing – mlw] Holley was one of them. I spent two days in St. Louis. There was quite a stir there in relation to expected Mexican War. I tell you, the St. Louis boys do things up about right, according to my notion of things. I went to the planters house, to The Cathedral, and the other different places of worship in the city. I walked myself completely down, and then did not satisfy my curiosity. I had the pleasure of the company of Mr. and Mrs. Kerty [?] down the Missouri River. I spoke of your talking of going down with me to St. Louis. Capt. Kirtly [?] regretted very much that you had not come. They put up at the City Hotel. William Hook was also on board yesterday. Hannah Ann, Cousin Sarah [?] Reeves, and myself spent the day with our new Cousin Mr. Bolinger. Cousin Martha Reeves and him were married in a few days after I started to Missouri. She put the right foot foremost, no mistake. She now lives in ease and affluence. He is a worthy man; stands high in the estimation of everybody that knows him. I have not seen Mary Jane since I got home. I have been twice to Elkton on business and did not have time to go to see Mary. I am going to see her in a day or two. I am told she still has the chills. Pa talks a little like visiting you this summer, but whether he will or not I am not able to say. He is so very [word I can't decipher – mlw] he has no overseer this year. He attends to his business himself. He goes late and early. He is never idle. There are but few men of his age that could undergo the fatigue he does. He volunteered to go to Texas, and would have gone if the volunteers from this county had gone. Brother B [Ben] is going to school from home. He goes about four miles. He is very wild and hard to manage. Was it not for that, I would try to persuade Pa to let him go to stay with you, but I am sure you could do nothing with him. We still keep Cousin Sarah Reeves with us, teaching our children. They are learning finely. I received a letter yesterday from Aunt P. Donley of Cumberland County. She writes me they have been a good deal afflicted with the chills this spring. Cousin H. Ewing's family are all well. He has gone to New Orleans. I believe they are all well at Cousin R. [?] Harrison's, though I have seen none of them since I arrived at home. I rarely ever see any of the family. They are mighty home folks. Cousin Edward Hall is a good deal complaining at this time with his old complaint, pain in the face. The balance of the relations in these parts, so far as I know, are generally well. My own family as well as Pa are generally well. We have had rather an over portion of rain lately. Notwithstanding, our crops look well of every description: corn, wheat, and tobacco. Next week our wheat will be ready for the sickle. Tell Aunt Givens when you see her, Hannah Ann had one or two chills during my absence but is now entirely free from them and her health good, perhaps better than usual. Tell the old lady I will write to her soon. You must write to me soon. I long to hear from you. Hannah Ann and the children send their love to you and family. Tell Ada I am coming for her next spring. She must have a new frock and bonnet, and I am sure she will take the shine of any of the little girls in this country. Tell Reeves he must make haste to write me a letter soon. Kiss little Kate for me. Give my respects to Mr. Leonard. Remember [me] affectionately to each one of the children. For yourself, accept the never-ceasing love of a brother.

I must come to a close. Farewell.
William L. Reeves

Letter to Mrs. J. E. [Jeanette] Leonard from B. H. [Benjamin Harrison] Reeves, dated Feby 27 [?] 1848 At Home

My dear child

I am now up, though barely able to hold my pen. I have not enjoyed anything like my usual good health since last summer. I of late have had quite a severe attack of pleurisy. Am now slowly recovering, though but barely able to ride over my farm and am perhaps much leaner than you ever saw me. The rest of my family I may say is all well except one Negro woman, Jane. She is quite sick, with an infant of four or five days old. The Doctor thinks her case a precarious and doubtful one. Your Brother William's family is all well. He and H. Ann and their children are all with us today. Hannah Ann is all glee and giddup [?]. She received a letter not long since from her Mother, who promises to come and see her in the spring – but wonderful [?] will be the disappointment if she fails to come.

Your Uncle Otway's family still lives in Elkton. They rarely, any of them, come to see us, though your Aunt Polly and Jennett called a moment at our house the other day on their way home from Mr. Jo Williams, where Polly had been to see her Sister Betsy, who is far gone with scroffula and probably can not live long. H. C. Ewin, Willis L. Reeves, and Messrs. [?] Clark and Harrison's families are in usual health. Jennette Ewin, that was, now Mrs. Pendleton, lives in Clarksville. Cousin Ed Hall and his flock are about as usual, and so with Cousin Billy Davis, children. Old Mrs. Philips is quite healthy. Mary Jane and her daughter Ellen I believe enjoy good health, though I but rarely ever see either of them.

Your Brother Ben has taken it into his head to write in the clerk's office and is now with his uncle Willis. I opposed his doing so all that I could, on the grounds that I thought he had better keep at his school, but he is so worn out with going to school that I yielded. He has grown to the size of a man, weighs now about 165 or 170 pounds, of my height and of fine constitution and appearance.

Last night, William Donnelly, son of your Uncle Wm. C. Donnelly, stayed with us – was on a hasty travel to Paris Tennessee on business. Promised to return in a week or so and spend a day or two with us. He left his friends all well. Stockden Donnelly you know is gone to Texas and lives within a day or two ride of Reuben A. Reeves. Reuben is said to succeed well in his profession and is quite popular.

I have thought I would try and visit you next spring or summer, and it may be that I will [be] able to do so, though I cannot be certain at this time.

Mr. McGarvey has moved from this country and I am told is now in St. Louis, but we have none of us received a line from him nor his family telling of their whereabouts. I think it very uncertain where he will locate. Lucy Crop that was, now Mrs. Lucy Garth, paid us a visit from Virginia this winter. They have returned back to their home in that state, but have left their blacks here and say they will move to this country next fall. George Ann Crop is quite anxious for me to go to Missouri in the spring. She is quite desirous to go with me and so is Virginia Carney. Mrs. Carney is now in New Orleans, having gone there with her Father on a flying visit. She probably may not return before May or June, or may return with her Father now in two or three weeks. Say to Mary and Martha, one or both of them ought to write to [me]. It would give me much pleasure to receive a letter from them. God bless and keep them is my most fervent prayer. To them and to Reeves, Ada, and my pale-faced little Kate—for pale she was when I last saw her—give to each of them my love. Tell them that uncle fellow (Crittenden) is quite a red-face chub, nearly as high when he is lying down as when standing. Reeves, my dear little fellow, when I last saw him it was in Rocheport [?]. My eyes followed him until the turn of the street hid him from my view and, oh God, grant that I may be spared to see him again and again.

Be everything, my dear child, to your own family, and fulfil in the highest degree the character of wife and mother, and remember that the young must get old and that the young and old must die, and oh may the almighty ruler of the universe fit and prepare you and I for us the duties of this life. But above all, [word missing – mlw] and prepare us for that life which is to come. My warmest confidence, esteem, and love to Mr. Leonard.

B. H. Reeves

Tell John, Lydia, and Betty to be good servants. Give them my respects.

Letter to J. [Jeanette] Leonard from W. L. [William Long] Reeves, dated April 24 1849 at Todd County Ky

Dear Sister

Your letter of date not recollected came to hand some days ago, which I omitted answering till I would see the final result of our dear old father, which has terminated in death. He has gone to try the realities of another World. He drew his last breath on Monday the 16th of this month, twenty minutes before twelve o'clock of that day. His remains were taken the next day to Uncle Willis L. Reeves's and there consigned to his narrow dwelling. Oh, my dear distant Sister, can you imagine the weight of my feelings in recording to you the death of a dear father. He is gone. Gone, I hope, to rest, he expressed a hope, beyond the grave. I have lost all now. I have no ties in Kentucky now. His talk while on his bed of affliction was Missouri. The last conversation he had with me was, he wanted to sell his land and go to Missouri, which he no doubt would have done could he only have got up again. Three days after he died they lost a bitchy young Negro girl. He left a will. Uncle Willis and P. L. Garth his executors. The [most of a line obliterated here – mlw]. I cannot at this time say where my destiny will be. I am without a home here. I would be glad, my dear Sister, if you would write to Ma soon and solicit her strongly to move to Missouri. It was Pa's wish for her to do so. Brother Ben is anxious to move to Missouri. We have lately had a spell of cold, frosty weather; killed all the fruit, bit the corn down, injured the wheat crops very much. H. C. Ewing is quite sick at this time. The balance of the relations, so far as I know, are well. Ma and the children are well. We are all on foot here [?]. I must draw to a close. My heart is too full to write. Give my love to all the friends in Mo. When did you see sister Mary?

For yourself, receive a brother's love.
W. L. Reeves

Notes:

The family that ties all these people together is the family of Benjamin Harrison Reeves (B.H. Reeves). He married Martha Donley (who was his first cousin), and their children were William Long Reeves (married Hannah Ann Givens), Davis Clark Reeves (who seems to have usually been called Clark; married Mary Jane Phillips), Jeanette E. Reeves (married Abiel Leonard), Mary Elizabeth Reeves (married William Adair Wilson), and Benjamin Harrison Reeves Jr. (not married during the time period of these letters). Ben Jr. was almost 13 years younger than Mary, and William was almost 10 years older than Mary, so there was a big spread in ages. They lived in what is now Todd County, Kentucky, until 1818, when they moved to Howard County, Missouri. (The counties were reorganized several times as population grew. Todd County was created in 1820, after B.H. and family had already left.) They also took along B.H.'s mother, Martha Davis Reeves, when they moved to Missouri. After B.H.'s wife,

Martha Donley Reeves, died in 1835, he moved back to Todd County, Kentucky, and remarried, to a widow named Virginia Garth Cross. They had three children together (Missouri, Eugenia, and Crittenden), and they both died in 1849—B.H. first and then Virginia only a few months later. Their three children were still pretty young at that time; the children from B.H.'s first marriage were grown (though Ben Jr. was only 19).

B.H. had three brothers: Archibald (never married), Otway (married Mary Ann Mansfield), and Willis (married four times). Martha Donley Reeves had the following siblings: Mary (Polly; married Benjamin H. Givens), Sallie (died young), Margaret (married Watts Davis Ewin), James (married Martha/Patsy Stockton), Charles (never married), and William (married Mary Stuart).

The first letter was written by Davis Clark Reeves. He mentions his wife, Mary, in one place, and he also mentions Mrs. Phillips, which I presume means Mary's mother. Mary Jane had a younger sister named Ellen, who was still young at the time of the letter (in fact, she would later die when she was only about 15), and who I assume is the Ellen traveling with Mrs. Phillips. Davis Clark and Mary Jane also had a daughter named Ellen, but she wasn't born yet at the time of this letter. She was probably named after Mary's sister Ellen, to honor her memory after she died. Clark's daughter Ellen would later be the mother of the Supreme Court Justice James Clark McReynolds. (Notice that the middle name Clark was his grandfather's name.) He writes about his father's new companion, who would be Virginia. He also mentions Grandmother in one place. That would be Martha Davis Reeves, who stayed in Missouri with the Leonards when B.H. moved back to Kentucky.

The second letter was written by B.H. Reeves after the death of Davis Clark Reeves in 1841. He was only 32 when he died. B.H. and his family were living in Todd County, and I assume that Clark and his family were also living there, not far away. Abiel and Jeanette Leonard were living in Howard County, Missouri, as was the oldest brother, William L. Reeves. So when B.H. asked Abiel to tell Clark's sister and brother, I assume those are whom he meant. Mary and William Wilson were also in Missouri, but in a different county. I suppose B.H. sent a separate letter to them. The Grandmother, Martha Davis Reeves, was already dead by this time.

The third letter was again written by B.H. Reeves. Apparently, William and his family had moved back to Kentucky by this time and were living nearby, since B.H. reports to Jeanette that they are well. There is mention of a Sally Reeves, who was living with William and teaching the children. I don't know for sure who she was, but I think she was probably a daughter of Otway Reeves. B.H.'s daughter Missouri is mentioned; I think she would have been about 7 years old at this time. His son Ben is mentioned; he would have been 16 at this time. I don't know who John Crop, Lucy, and Catharine were. Willis Reeves, B.H.'s younger brother, was married to Caroline Wilson at this time. She had a previous marriage to James Connelly, and I suppose the unfortunate Eliza was from that previous marriage. (Willis Reeves had four wives that I know of. It seems that men tended to live longer than women back then, unlike today. A lot of women died in childbirth. Of course, a lot of men died in wars, too.) Mary Jane Reeves was the aforementioned wife of Clark Reeves. Don't know who Mr. McGarvey was. W. Ewin was Watts Davis Ewin, who also lived in Howard County, Missouri. According to John Wanamaker, John was one of the Leonards' slaves; I don't know about Charles.

The fourth letter was written by William Long Reeves, still living in Todd County. This is a newsy letter, which mentions a lot of names. He also mentions the Mexican War, which had started very shortly before this letter was written. Hannah Ann was his wife. He mentions Cousin Sarah Reeves, who I believe was the same as the Sally Reeves mentioned in the previous letter. Cousin Martha Reeves was a daughter of Otway Reeves (and therefore probably a sister of Sarah/Sally). When this letter was written, Martha had recently married Henry H. Bollinger. It sounds like he was pretty well off. He was also quite a bit older than she, and was a widower. Mary Jane Reeves, widow of Clark Reeves, is mentioned again, as is

Ben Jr. (who was “wild and hard to manage”). Aunt P. Donley was Patsy Stockton Donley. Another Ewin/Ewing is mentioned (“Cousin H. Ewing”; probably Henry Clayton Ewin, brother of Watts Davis Ewin), who must have been living near William in Kentucky. Apparently some other cousins named Harrison were also living nearby (a cousin, Sarah Davis, married Robert T. Harrison). Yet another cousin, Edward Hall, is mentioned. He was married to Jeannetta Ewin, sister of Watts Davis and Henry Clayton Ewin, and they must also have been living nearby. (By the way, B.H. and family were related to all these Ewins because their mother was Sarah/Sally Davis Ewin, sister of Martha Davis Reeves. Watts Davis Ewin is another one who married his first cousin.) William asks Jeanette to tell Aunt Givens about Hannah Ann. I think “Aunt Givens” was Hannah Ann’s mother, who I guess was living in Missouri near Jeanette and Abiel Leonard. (William Long Reeves and Hannah Ann Givens Reeves were yet another pair of married first cousins, so Hannah’s mother would have been his mother-in-law as well as his aunt.) Ada, Reeves, and Kate were Jeanette’s children. They were little kids at the time of this letter.

The fifth letter was written by B.H. Reeves, recovering from being sick (and only about a year before his death). It is another newsy one with even more names. He mentions William and Hannah Ann and their children, who lived nearby. He mentions the family of his brother Otway, but doesn’t give any particular names. I can’t tell from the way it’s worded if Otway himself was still alive or not. I’m not sure about Aunt Polly, Jennett, and Betsy. As far as I know, Jeanette Leonard’s Aunt Polly was Polly Donley Givens, but I don’t know of a sister Betsy. Otway Reeves had a daughter Jennett, which might fit the context of the letter. H. C. Ewin is mentioned; presumably Henry Clayton Ewin. Willis L. Reeves is mentioned again. The Harrisons are probably the same as mentioned in the previous letter. Someone named Clark is also mentioned here. I have a record of another Davis daughter who married a Clark. I don’t know who the Jennette Ewin was, who married a Pendleton. Ed Hall and his family are mentioned again. Another Davis is mentioned, Billy. (Recall that B.H.’s mother’s maiden name was Davis. These various Davises are on her side of the family.) “Old Mrs. Philips” is mentioned; presumably Mary Jane Phillips Reeves’ mother. And Mary Jane and her daughter, Ellen (who would have been B.H.’s granddaughter), are also mentioned. Ben Jr. is mentioned as working in the clerk’s office with his uncle Willis. Willis L. Reeves was the Todd County Clerk for many years. Then there are mentions of William and William C. Donnelly. William C. Donnelly/Donley is presumably a brother of B.H.’s first wife, Martha Donley Reeves. Stockden, or Stockton, Donnelly/Donley, was the son of James Donley and Patsy Stockton, mentioned previously. I think that Reuben A. Reeves was a son of Otway Reeves, but I’m not completely sure. At any rate, he became an eminent judge in Texas, serving on the Texas state supreme court and on the supreme court of the Territory of New Mexico. (Stockton Donley also served on the supreme court of Texas, and Donley County, Texas, was named for him.) Mr. McGarvey is mentioned again. I still don’t know who he was. I suppose a close neighbor. Don’t know who Lucy and George Ann Crop were, or Virginia Carney. More neighbors? Mary, Martha, Reeves, Ada, and Kate were Jeanette’s children. They were 15, 12, 9, 6, and almost 4, respectively, at the time of this letter. Crittenden, B.H.’s youngest son (and therefore the uncle of Jeanette’s children), was only 5 himself. The “servants” mentioned at the end were actually slaves; the Leonards and these various Reeves families owned slaves. John Wanamaker told me that Lydia was a wedding gift from B.H. to Jeanette and Abiel when they were married in 1830, and she continued working for Jeanette as a servant even after the Civil War (Abiel Leonard died in 1863, during the Civil War).

The sixth letter was written by William Long Reeves after the death of Benjamin Harrison Reeves in 1849. William was still living in Kentucky. He was still there the following year at the time of the 1850 census, but he moved back to Missouri soon after that. William spends part of the letter talking about getting Virginia to move to Missouri, but as I said, she would die not too long after this. William took all the younger ones to Missouri after she died. The two girls (Missouri and Eugenia) went to live with the Leonards, and Crittenden (and maybe Ben Jr. for a while) lived with William, though Crittenden went back to Kentucky after a few years. William mentions his Uncle Willis, B.H.’s younger brother, in a couple of places. He was still living there in Todd County. B.H.’s other brothers were already dead by

this time. I'm not sure who some of the other names were. A Garth is mentioned. That was Virginia's maiden name, so it might be her father or brother. H. C. Ewing/Ewin is mentioned again. At the end of the letter, William mentions "sister Mary", who would be Mary Reeves Wilson, my great³ grandmother.